Public Law 95-341
95th Congress

Joint Resolution

American Indian Religious Freedom.

Aug. 11, 1978
[S.J. Res. 102]

Whereas the freedom of religion for all people is an inherent right, fundamental to the democratic structure of the United States and is guaranteed by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution;

Whereas the United States has traditionally rejected the concept of a government denying individuals the right to practice their religion and, as a result, has benefited from a rich variety of religious heritages in this country;

Whereas the religious practices of the American Indian (as well as Native Alaskan and Hawaiian) are an integral part of their culture, tradition and heritage, such practices forming the basis of Indian identity and value systems;

Whereas the traditional American Indian religions, as an integral part of Indian life, are indispensable and irreplaceable;

Whereas the lack of a clear, comprehensive, and consistent Federal policy has often resulted in the abridgment of religious freedom for traditional American Indians;

Whereas such religious infringements result from the lack of knowledge or the insensitive and inflexible enforcement of Federal policies and regulations premised on a variety of laws;

Whereas such laws were designed for such worthwhile purposes as conservation and preservation of natural species and resources but were never intended to relate to Indian religious practices and, therefore, were passed without consideration of their effect on traditional American Indian religions;

Whereas such laws and policies often deny American Indians access to sacred sites required in their religions, including cemeteries;

Whereas such laws at times prohibit the use and possession of sacred objects necessary to the exercise of religious rites and ceremonies;

Whereas traditional American Indian ceremonies have been intruded upon, interfered with, and in a few instances banned: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That henceforth it shall be the policy of the United States to protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise the traditional religions of the American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut, and Native Hawaiians, including but not limited to access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rites.

American Indian Religious Freedom.
42 USC 1996.

42 USC 1996 note.

SEC. 2. The President shall direct the various Federal departments, agencies, and other instrumentalities responsible for administering relevant laws to evaluate their policies and procedures in consultation with native traditional religious leaders in order to determine appropriate changes necessary to protect and preserve Native American religious cultural rights and practices. Twelve months after approval of this resolution, the President shall report back to the Congress the results of his evaluation, including any changes which were made in administrative policies and procedures, and any recommendations he may have for legislative action.

Presidential report to Congress.

Approved August 11, 1978.

R U L E S

GOVERNING

THE COURT OF INDIAN OFFENSES

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,

OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,

Washington, March 30, 1883.

SIR: Your special attention is directed to the following copy of Department letter, viz:

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,

Washington, December 2, 1882

SIR: I desire to call your attention to what I regard as a great hindrance to the civilization of the Indians, viz, the continuance of the old heathenish dances, such as the sun-dance, scalp-dance, & c. These dances, or feasts, as they are sometimes called, ought, in my judgment, to be discontinued, and if the Indians now supported by the Government are not willing to discontinue them, the agents should be instructed to compel such discontinuance. These feasts or dances are not social gatherings for the amusement of these people, but, on the contrary, are intended and calculated to stimulate the warlike passions of the young warriors of the tribe. At such feasts the warrior recounts his deeds of daring, boasts of his inhumanity in the destruction of his enemies, and his treatment of the female captives, in language that ought to shock even a savage ear. The audience assents approvingly to his boasts of falsehood, deceit, theft, murder, and rape, and the young listener is informed that this and this only is the road to fame and renown. The result is the demoralization of the young, who are incited to emulate the wicked conduct of their elders, without a thought that in so doing they violate any law, but, on the contrary, with the conviction that in so doing they are securing for themselves an enduring and deserved fame among their people. Active measures should be taken to discourage all feasts and dances of the character I have mentioned.

The marriage relation is also one requiring the immediate attention of the agents. While the Indians remain in a state of at least semi-independence, there did not seem to be any great necessity for interference, even if such interference was practicable (which it doubtless was not). While dependent on the chase the Indian did not take many wives, and the great mass found themselves too poor to support more than one; but since the Government supports them, this objection no longer exists, and the more numerous the family the greater the number of rations allowed. I would not advise any interference with plural marriages now existing; but I would by all possible methods discourage future marriages of that character. The marriage relation, if it may be said to exist at all among the Indians, is exceedingly lax in its character, and it will be found impossible, for some time yet, to impress them with our idea of this important relation.

The marriage state, existing only by the consent of both parties, is easily and readily dissolved, the man not recognizing any obligation on his part to care for his offspring. As far as practicable, the Indian, having taken to himself a wife, should be compelled to continue that relation with her, unless dissolved by some recognized tribunal on the reservation or by the courts. Some system of marriage should be adopted, and the Indian compelled to conform to it. The Indian should also be instructed that he is under obligations to care for and support, not only his wife, but his children, and on his failure, without

proper cause, to continue as the head of such family, he ought in some manner to be punished, which should be either by confinement in the guardhouse or agency prison, or by a reduction of his rations.

Another great hindrance to the civilization of the Indians is the influence of the medicine men, who are always found with the anti-progressive party. The medicine men resort to various artifices and devices to keep the people under their influence, and are especially active in preventing the attendance of the children at the public schools, using their conjurers' arts to prevent the people from abandoning their heathenish rites and customs. While they profess to cure diseases by the administering of a few simple remedies, still they rely mainly on their art of conjuring. Their services are not required even for the administration of the few simple remedies they are competent to recommend, for the Government supplies the several agencies with skillful physicians, who practice among the Indians without charge to them. Steps should be taken to compel these imposters to abandon this deception and discontinue their practice, which are not only without benefit to the Indians but positively injurious to them.

The value of property as an agent of civilization ought not to be overlooked. When an Indian acquires property, with a disposition to retain the same, free from tribal or individual interference, he has made a step forward in the road to civilization. One great obstacle to the acquirement of property by the Indian is the very general custom of destroying or distributing his property on the death of a member of his family. Frequently on the death of an important member of the family all the property accumulated by its head is destroyed or carried off by the "mourners," and his family left in desolation and want. While in their independent state but little inconvenience was felt in such a case, on account of the general community of interest and property, in their present condition not only real inconvenience is felt, but disastrous consequences follow. I am informed by reliable authority that frequently the head of a family, finding himself thus stripped of his property, becomes discouraged, and makes no further attempt to become a property owner. Fear of being considered mean and attachment to the dead frequently prevents the owner from interfering to save his property while it is being destroyed in his presence and contrary to his wishes.

It will be extremely difficult to accomplish much towards the civilization of the Indians while these adverse influences are allowed to exist.

The Government having attempted to support the Indians until such time as they shall become self-supporting, the interest of the Government as well as that of the Indians demands that every possible effort should be made to induce them to become self-supporting at as early a day as possible. I therefore suggest whether it is not practicable to formulate certain rules for the government of the Indians on the reservations that shall restrict and ultimately abolish the practices I have mentioned. I am not ignorant of the difficulties that will be encountered in this effort; yet I believe in all the tribes there will be found many Indians who will aid the Government in its efforts to abolish rites and customs so injurious to the Indians and so contrary to the civilization that they earnestly desire.

Very respectfully,

1. M. TELLER

Secretary.

Hon. HIRAM PRICE,

Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

In compliance with the suggestions contained in the foregoing letter, the following rules are promulgated for the guidance and direction of the several United States Indian agents, and each agent will see to it that the requirements thereof are strictly enforced, with the view of having the evil practices mentioned by the honorable Secretary ultimately abolished.

RULES

1st. There shall be established at each Indian agency, except the agency for the five civilized tribes in the Indian Territory, a tribunal, consisting of three Indians, to be known as "the Court of Indian Offenses," and the three members of said court shall each be styled "Judge of the Court of Indian Offenses."

The first three officers in rank of the police force at each agency shall serve as judges of said court, when practicable, and when in the opinion of the agent said police officers are fit and competent persons to satisfactorily perform the duties thereof. The police officer highest in rank shall be the presiding judge. If, however, any of the said police officers are considered by the agent to be improper persons to be so appointed, or in the event of there being no police officers, then the agent may select from among the members of the tribe persons of intelligence and good moral character and integrity, and recommend the same to this office for appointment as judges in lieu of the officers of the police force aforesaid.

Each judge shall be appointed by this office for a term of one year, subject to removal at any time, at the discretion of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs; provided, however, that no person shall be eligible to appointment as a member of said court who is a polygamist; and provided further, that the judges herein provided for shall receive no money consideration on account of their services in connection with said court.

2d. The Court of Indian Offenses shall hold at least two regular sessions in each and every month, the time and place for holding said sessions to be agreed upon by the judges, or a majority of them, and approved by the agent; and special sessions of the court may be held when requested by three reputable members of the tribe, and approved by the agent.

3d. The court as above organized shall hear and pass judgment upon all such questions as may be presented to it for consideration by the agent, or by his approval, and shall have original jurisdiction over all "Indian offenses" designated as such in Rules 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 of these rules. The judgment of the court may be by two judges; and that the several orders of the court may be carried into full effect, the United States Indian agent is hereby authorized and empowered to compel the attendance of witnesses at any session of the court, and enforce, with the aid of the police, if necessary, all orders that may be passed by the court or a majority thereof; but all orders, decrees, or judgments of the court shall be subject to approval or disapproval of the agent, and an appeal to and final revision by this office; provided that when an appeal is taken to this office, the appellant shall furnish security satisfactory to the court, and approved by the agent, for good and peaceful behavior pending the final decision of this office.

4th. The "sun-dance," the "scalp-dance," the "war-dance," and all other so-called feasts assimilating thereto, shall be considered "Indian offenses," and any Indian found guilty of being a participant in any one or more of these "offenses" shall, for the first offense committed, be punished by withholding from the person or persons so found guilty by the court his or their rations for a period not exceeding ten days; and if found guilty of any subsequent offense under this rule, shall by punished by withholding his or their rations for a period not less than fifteen days, nor more than thirty days, or by incarceration in the agency prison for a period not exceeding thirty days.

5th. Any plural marriage hereafter contracted or entered into by any member of an Indian tribe under the supervision of a United States Indian agent shall be considered an "Indian offense," cognizable by the Court of Indian Offenses; and upon trial and conviction thereof by said court the offender shall pay a fine of not less than twenty dollars, or work at hard labor for a period of twenty days, or both, at the discretion of the court, the proceeds thereof to be devoted to the benefit of the tribe to which the offender may at the time belong; and so long as the Indian shall continue in this unlawful relation he

shall forfeit all right to receive ration s from the Government. And whenever it shall be proven to the satisfaction of the court that any member of the tribe fails, without proper cause, to support his wife and children, no rations shall be issued to him until such time as satisfactory assurance is given to the court, approved by the agent, that the offender will provide for his family to the best of his ability.

6th. The usual practices of so-called "medicine-men" shall be considered "Indian offenses" cognizable by the Court of Indian Offenses, and whenever it shall be proven to the satisfaction of the court that the influence or practice of a so-called "medicine-man" operates as a hinderance to the civilization of a tribe, or that said "medicine-man" resorts to any artifice or device to keep the Indians under his influence, or shall adopt any means to prevent the attendance of children at the agency schools, or shall use any of the arts of a conjurer to prevent the Indians from abandoning their heathenish rites and customs, he shall be adjudged guilty of an Indian offense, and upon conviction of any one or more of these specified practices, or, any other, in the opinion of the court, of an equally anti-progressive nature, shall be confined in the agency prison for a term not less than ten days, or until such time as he shall produce evidence satisfactory to the court, and approved by the agent, that he will forever abandon all practices styled Indian offenses under this rule.

7th. Any Indian under the charge of a United States Indian agent who shall willfully destroy, or with intent to steal or destroy, shall take and carry away any property of any value or description, being the property free from tribal interference, of any other Indian or Indians, shall, without reference to the value thereof, be deemed guilty of an "Indian offense," and, upon trial and conviction thereof by the Court of Indian Offenses, shall be compelled to return the stolen property to the proper owner, or, in case the property shall have been lost or destroyed, the estimated full value thereof, and in any event the party or parties so found guilty shall be confined in the agency prison for a term not exceeding thirty days; and it shall not be considered a sufficient or satisfactory answer to any of the offenses set forth in this rule that the party charged was at the time a "mourner," and thereby justified in taking or destroying the property in accordance with the customs or rites of the tribe.

8th. Any Indian or mixed-blood who shall pay or offer to pay any money or other valuable consideration to the friends or relatives of any Indian girl or woman, for the purpose of living or cohabiting with said girl or woman, shall be deemed guilty of an Indian offense, and upon conviction thereof shall forfeit all right to Government rations for a period at the discretion of the agent, or be imprisoned in the agency prison for a period not exceeding sixty days; and any Indian or mixed-blood who shall receive or offer to receive any consideration for the purpose herein before specified shall be punished in a similar manner as provided for the party paying or offering to pay the said consideration; and if any white man shall be found guilty of any of the offenses herein mentioned he shall be immediately removed from the reservation and not allowed to return thereto.

9th. In addition to the offenses herein before enumerated, the Court of Indian Offenses shall also have jurisdiction (subject to the provisions of Rule 3) of misdemeanors committed by Indians belonging to the reservation, and of civil suits where Indians are parties thereto; and any Indian who shall be found intoxicated, or who shall sell, exchange, give, barter, or dispose of any spirituous, vinous, or fermented liquors to any other Indian, or who shall introduce or attempt to introduce, under any pretense whatever, any spirituous, vinous, or fermented liquors on the reservation, shall be punishable by imprisonment for not less than thirty day nor more than ninety days, or by the withholding of Government rations therefrom, at the discretion of the court and approval of the agent.

The civil jurisdiction of such court shall be the same as that of a justice of the peace in the State or Territory where such court is located, and the practice in such civil cases shall conform as nearly as practicable to the rules governing the practice of justices of the peace in such State or Territory; and it shall also be the duty of the court to instruct, advise, and inform either or both parties to any suit in regard to the requirements of these rules.